Understanding and Developing Emotional Intelligence

By Olivier Serrat

Emotional intelligence describes an ability, capacity, skill, or self-perceived ability to identify, assess, and manage the emotions of one's self, of others, and of groups. The theory is enjoying considerable support in the literature and has had successful applications in many domains.

Introduction

The intelligence quotient, or IQ, is a score derived from one of several different standardized tests to measure intelligence.[1] It has been used to assess giftedness, and sometimes underpin recruitment. Many have argued that IQ, or conventional intelligence, is too narrow: some people are academically brilliant yet socially and interpersonally inept.[2] And we know that success does not automatically follow those who possess a high IQ rating.

Figure 1: An Emotional Intelligence Assessment Tool for the Workplace

Source: Genos. 2009. Available: www.genos.com.au/home

Wider areas of intelligence enable or dictate how successful we are. Toughness, determination, and vision help. But emotional intelligence, often measured as an emotional intelligence quotient, or EQ, is more and more relevant to important work-related outcomes such as individual performance, organizational productivity, and developing people because its principles provide a new way to understand and assess the behaviors, management styles, attitudes, interpersonal skills, and potential of people. It is an increasingly important consideration in human resource planning, job profiling, recruitment interviewing and selection, learning and development, and client relations and customer service, among others.

[1] When psychologists began to think about intelligence they focused attention on cognitive aspects such as memory and problem solving.

[2] As early as 1920, Robert Thorndike used the term "social intelligence" to describe the skill of understanding and managing other people. In the 1940s, David Wechsler defined intelligence as the aggregate or global capacity of the individual to act purposefully, think rationally, and deal effectively with his (or her) environment. In 1943, he submitted that non-intellective abilities are essential for predicting one's ability to succeed in life. Later, in 1983, Howard Gardner wrote about multiple intelligences and proposed that intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences are as important as the type of intelligence typically measured by IQ and related tests.

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Definition

Emotional intelligence describes the ability, capacity, skill, or self-perceived ability to identify, assess, and manage the emotions of one's self, of others, and of groups. People who possess a high degree of emotional intelligence know themselves very well and are also able to sense the emotions of others. They are affable, resilient, and optimistic. Surprisingly, emotional intelligence is a relatively recent behavioral model: it was not until the publication of *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* by Daniel Goleman that the term became popular.[3]

Benefits

By developing their emotional intelligence individuals can become more productive and successful at what they do, and help others become more productive and successful too. The process and outcomes of emotional intelligence development also contain many elements known to reduce stress—for individuals and therefore organizations—by moderating conflict; promoting understanding and relationships; and fostering stability, continuity, and harmony. Last but not least, it links strongly with concepts of love and spirituality.[4]

> *If your emotional abilities aren't in hand, if you don't have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far.*
>
> —Daniel Goleman

The Model

Individuals have different personalities, wants, needs, and ways of showing their emotions. Navigating through this requires tact and shrewdness—especially if one hopes to succeed in life. This is where emotional intelligence theory helps. In the most generic framework, five domains of emotional intelligence cover together personal (self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation) and social (social awareness and social skills) competences.[5] They are

> *Emotions have taught mankind to reason.*
>
> —Marquis de Vauvenargues

- Self-Awareness
  - (i) Emotional awareness: Recognizing one's emotions and their effects.
  - (ii) Accurate self-assessment: Knowing one's strengths and limits.
  - (iii) Self-confidence: Sureness about one's self-worth and capabilities.
- Self-Regulation
  - (i) Self-control: Managing disruptive emotions and impulses.
  - (ii) Trustworthiness: Maintaining standards of honesty and integrity.
  - (iii) Conscientiousness: Taking responsibility for personal performance.

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[3] Emotional intelligence draws from branches of behavioral, emotional, and communications theories. Goleman is the person most commonly associated with it. (But he is by no means the only researcher: the most distant roots of emotional intelligence can be traced to Charles Darwin's early work on the importance of emotional expression for survival and adaptation.) Wayne Leon Payne is credited with first using the term "emotional intelligence" in 1985. Soon after, in 1990, John Mayer and Peter Salovey described that as the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions. In 1997, their four branch model defined emotional intelligence as involving the abilities to perceive, accurately, emotions in oneself and others; use emotions to facilitate thinking; understand the meaning of emotions; and manage emotions. They also tried to develop a way to scientifically measure differences between people's abilities in the area of emotions.

[4] Nor surprisingly, perhaps, Goleman published *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Social Relationships* in 2006 to illuminate theories about attachment, bonding, and the making and remaking of memory as he examined how our brains are wired for altruism, compassion, concern, and rapport. Good relationships nourish us and support our health, while toxic relationships can poison us. He proposed that social intelligence is made up of social awareness (including empathy, attunement, empathic accuracy, and social cognition) and social facility (including synchrony, self-presentation, influence, and concern).

[5] The material that follows comes from the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations. 1998. *Emotional Competence Framework*. Available: www.eiconsortium.org/reports/emotional_competence_framework.html

(iv) Adaptability: Flexibility in handling change.
(v) Innovativeness: Being comfortable with and open to novel ideas and new information.

- Self-Motivation
  (i) Achievement drive: Striving to improve or meet a standard of excellence.
  (ii) Commitment: Aligning with the goals of the group or organization.
  (iii) Initiative: Readiness to act on opportunities.
  (iv) Optimism: Persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks.
- Social Awareness
  (i) Empathy: Sensing others' feelings and perspective, and taking an active interest in their concerns.
  (ii) Service orientation: Anticipating, recognizing, and meeting customers' needs.
  (iii) Developing others: Sensing what others need in order to develop, and bolstering their abilities.
  (iv) Leveraging diversity: Cultivating opportunities through diverse people.
  (v) Political awareness: Reading a group's emotional currents and power relationships.
- Social Skills
  (i) Influence: Wielding effective tactics for persuasion.
  (ii) Communication: Sending clear and convincing messages.
  (iii) Leadership: Inspiring and guiding groups and people.
  (iv) Change catalyst: Initiating or managing change.
  (v) Conflict management: Negotiating and resolving disagreements.
  (vi) Building bonds: Nurturing instrumental relationships.
  (vii) Collaboration and cooperation: Working with others toward shared goals.
  (viii) Team capabilities: Creating group synergy in pursuing collective goals.

Figure 2: The Domains of Emotional Intelligence

Source: Author.

In brief, the five domains relate to knowing your emotions; managing your emotions; motivating yourself; recognizing and understanding other people's emotions; and managing relationships, i.e., managing the emotions of others.

> *I respect the man who knows distinctly what he wishes. The greater part of all mischief in the world arises from the fact that men do not sufficiently understand their own aims. They have undertaken to build a tower, and spend no more labor on the foundation than would be necessary to erect a hut.*
>
> —Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Table: The Personal and Social Attributes of Emotional Intelligence

Competence		Attribute
Self-Awareness		
	Emotional Awareness	Individuals with this competence • Know which emotions they are feeling and why; • Realize the links between their feelings and what they think, do, and say; • Recognize how their feelings affect their performance; and • Have a guiding awareness of their values and goals.
	Accurate Self-Assessment	Individuals with this competence are • Aware of their strengths and weaknesses; • Reflective, learning from experience; • Open to candid feedback, new perspectives, continuous learning, and self-development; and • Able to show a sense of humor and perspective about themselves.
	Self-Confidence	Individuals with this competence • Present themselves with self-assurance and have presence; • Can voice views that are unpopular and go out on a limb for what is right; and • Are decisive and able to make sound decisions despite uncertainties and pressures.
Self-Regulation		
	Self-Control	Individuals with this competence • Manage their impulsive feelings and distressing emotions well; • Stay composed, positive, and unflappable even in trying moments; and • Think clearly and stay focused under pressure.
	Trustworthiness	Individuals with this competence • Act ethically and are above reproach; • Build trust through their reliability and authenticity; • Admit their own mistakes and confront unethical actions in others; and • Take tough, principled stands even if they are unpopular.
	Conscientiousness	Individuals with this competence • Meet commitments and keep promises; • Hold themselves accountable for meeting their objectives; and • Are organized and careful in their work.
	Adaptability	Individuals with this competence • Smoothly handle multiple demands, shifting priorities, and rapid change; • Adapt their responses and tactics to fit fluid circumstances; and • Are flexible in how they see events.
	Innovativeness	Individuals with this competence • Seek out fresh ideas from a wide variety of sources; • Entertain original solutions to problems; • Generate new ideas; and • Take fresh perspectives and risks in their thinking.

Competence		Attribute
Self-Motivation		
	Achievement Drive	Individuals with this competence • Are results-oriented, with a high drive to meet their objectives and standards; • Set challenging goals and take calculated risks; • Pursue information to reduce uncertainty and find ways to do better; and • Learn how to improve their performance.
	Commitment	Individuals with this competence • Readily make personal or group sacrifices to meet a larger organizational goal; • Find a sense of purpose in the larger mission; • Use the group's core values in making decisions and clarifying choices; and • Actively seek out opportunities to fulfill the group's mission.
	Initiative	Individuals with this competence • Are ready to seize opportunities; • Pursue goals beyond what is required or expected of them; • Cut through red tape and bend the rules when necessary to get the job done; and • Mobilize others through unusual, enterprising efforts.
	Optimism	Individuals with this competence • Persist in seeking goals despite obstacles and setbacks; • Operate from hope of success rather than fear of failure; and • See setbacks as due to manageable circumstance rather than a personal flaw.
Social Awareness		
	Empathy	Individuals with this competence • Are attentive to emotional cues and listen well; • Show sensitivity and understand others' perspectives; and • Help out based on understanding other people's needs and feelings.
	Service Orientation	Individuals with this competence • Understand customers' needs and match them to services or products; • Seek ways to increase customers' satisfaction and loyalty; • Gladly offer appropriate assistance; and • Grasp a customer's perspective, acting as a trusted advisor.
	Developing Others	Individuals with this competence • Acknowledge and reward people's strengths, accomplishments, and development; • Offer useful feedback and identify people's needs for development; and • Mentor, give timely coaching, and offer assignments that challenge and grow a person's skills.
	Leveraging Diversity	Individuals with this competence • Respect and relate well to people from varied backgrounds; • Understand diverse worldviews and are sensitive to group differences; • See diversity as opportunity, creating an environment where diverse people can thrive; and • Challenge bias and intolerance.
	Political Awareness	Individuals with this competence • Accurately read key power relationships; • Detect crucial social networks; • Understand the forces that shape views and actions of clients, customers, or competitors; and • Accurately read situations and organizational and external realities.

Competence		Attribute
Social Skills		
	Influence	Individuals with this competence • Are skilled at persuasion; • Fine-tune presentations to appeal to the listener; • Use complex strategies like indirect influence to build consensus and support; and • Orchestrate dramatic events to effectively make a point.
	Communication	Individuals with this competence • Are effective in give-and-take, registering emotional cues in attuning their message; • Deal with difficult issues straightforwardly. • Listen well, seek mutual understanding, and welcome sharing of information fully; and • Foster open communication and stay receptive to bad news as well as good.
	Leadership	Individuals with this competence • Articulate and arouse enthusiasm for a shared vision and mission; • Step forward to lead as needed, regardless of position; • Guide the performance of others while holding them accountable; and • Lead by example.
	Change Catalyst	Individuals with this competence • Recognize the need for change and remove barriers; • Challenge the status quo to acknowledge the need for change; • Champion the change and enlist others in its pursuit; and • Model the change expected of others.
	Conflict Management	Individuals with this competence • Handle difficult people and tense situations with diplomacy and tact; • Spot potential conflict, bring disagreements into the open, and help deescalate; • Encourage debate and open discussion; and • Orchestrate win-win solutions.
	Building Bonds	Individuals with this competence • Cultivate and maintain extensive informal networks; • Seek out relationships that are mutually beneficial; • Build rapport and keep others in the loop; and • Make and maintain personal friendships among work associates.
	Collaboration and Cooperation	Individuals with this competence • Balance a focus on task with attention to relationships; • Collaborate, sharing plans, information, and resources; • Promote a friendly and cooperative climate; and • Spot and nurture opportunities for collaboration.
	Team Capabilities	Individuals with this competence • Model team qualities such as respect, helpfulness, and cooperation; • Draw all members into active and enthusiastic participation; • Build team identity, esprit de corps, and commitment; and • Protect the group and its reputation and share credit.

Source: Developed from Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations. 1998. *Emotional Competence Framework.* Available: www.eiconsortium.org/reports/emotional_competence_framework.html

Can Emotional Intelligence be Learned?

A common question relates to whether people are born with high EQ or whether it can be learned. The truth is that some will be more naturally gifted than others but the good news are that emotional intelligence skills can be learned. (This must be so because emotional intelligence is shown to increase with age.) However, for this to happen, people must be personally motivated, practice extensively what they learn, receive feedback, and reinforce their new skills.

> *Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.*
>
> —Ralph Waldo Emerson

Promoting Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace

The work conducted in most organizations has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. Of course, there are now fewer levels of management and management styles are less autocratic. But there has also been a decided move toward knowledge and team-based, client-oriented jobs so that individuals generally have more autonomy, even at the lower levels of organizations. Since modern organizations always look to improve performance, they recognize that objective, measurable benefits can be derived from higher emotional intelligence. To name a few, these include increased sales, better recruitment and retention, and more effective leadership.

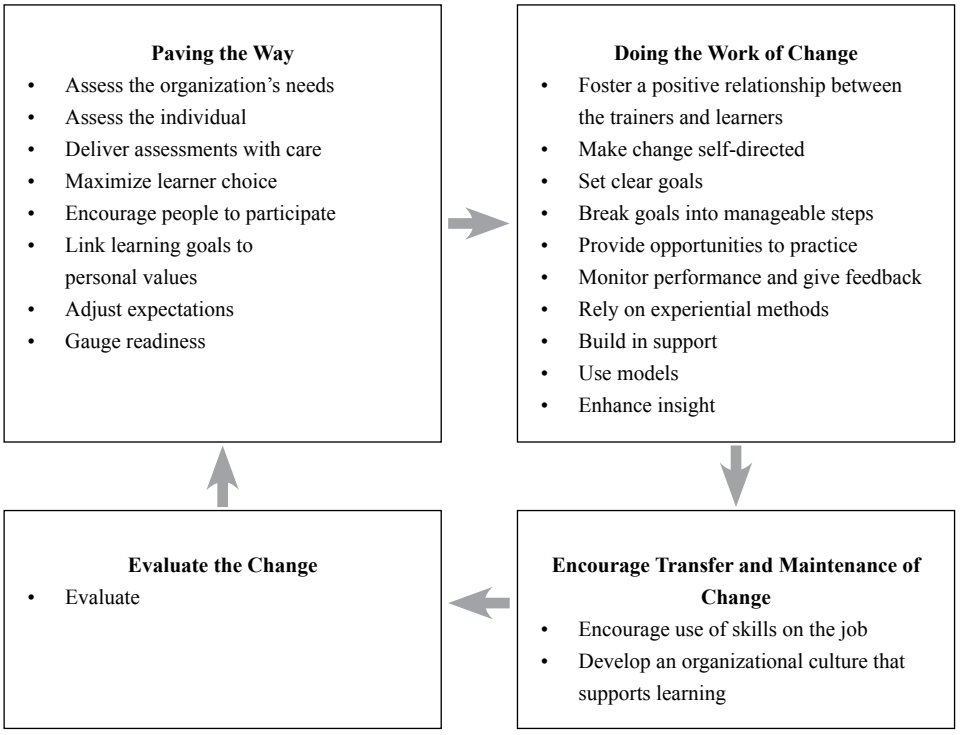
> *Comfort in expressing your emotions will allow you to share the best of yourself with others, but not being able to control your emotions will reveal your worst.*
>
> —Bryant H. McGill

Naturally, the criteria for success at work are changing too. Staff are now judged by new yardsticks: not just by how smart they are, or by their training and expertise, but also by how well they handle themselves and one another. And that is strongly influenced by personal qualities such as perseverance, self-control, and skill in getting along with others. Increasingly, these new yardsticks are being applied to choose who will be hired and who will not, who will be let go and who will be retained, and who will be past over or promoted.

Emotional intelligence may be the (long-sought) missing link that unites conventional "can do" ability determinants of job performance with "will do" dispositional determinants. Modern organizations now offer learning and development that is explicitly labeled as "emotional intelligence" or "emotional competence" training. In support, their leaders create and manage a working environment of flexibility, responsibility, standards, rewards, clarity, and commitment.[6]

[6] This climate determines how free staff feel to innovate unencumbered by red tape; perceptions of responsibility to the organization; the level of standards that are set; the sense of accuracy about performance feedback and the aptness of rewards; the clarity staff have about the organization's mission, vision, and values; and the level of commitment to a common purpose.

Figure 2: Good Practices that Cultivate Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace


Paving the Way
Assess the organization's needs
Assess the individual
Deliver assessments with care
Maximize learner choice
Encourage people to participate
Link learning goals to personal values
Adjust expectations
Gauge readiness
Doing the Work of Change
Foster a positive relationship between the trainers and learners
Make change self-directed
Set clear goals
Break goals into manageable steps
Provide opportunities to practice
Monitor performance and give feedback
Rely on experiential methods
Build in support
Use models
Enhance insight
Encourage Transfer and Maintenance of Change
Encourage use of skills on the job
Develop an organizational culture that supports learning
Evaluate the Change
Evaluate

Source: Author.
Note: The four phases correspond to those of the development process, viz., preparation, training, transfer and maintenance, and evaluation. Each is important.
Source: Summarized and developed from Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations. 1998. *Guidelines for Best Practice*. Available: www.eiconsortium.org/reports/guidelines.html

Further Reading

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